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SUBJECT: EUROBAROMETER: PERCEPTIONS OF U.S. WORSENING

1. SUMMARY: The latest Eurobarometer poll will gladden hearts in Brussels: a growing majority in Europe has a positive attitude about the EU and its institutions. Still, weak support in the UK especially will give Eurocrats pause as Europe enters a year of referenda on the new Constitution. The poll also indicates a continuation of the worrying trends revealed earlier in the fall by German Marshall Fund polling: fifty-eight percent of respondents said the U.S. plays a negative role in promoting world peace. END SUMMARY.

METHODOLOGY AND CONTEXT

2. The European Commission's twice-yearly Eurobarometer poll was conducted in October and November 2004, through roughly 1000 face-to-face interviews in each Member State. The poll also solicited opinions in the four candidate countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Turkey) and Northern Cyprus. In the period since last spring's poll, there has been an unusual level of political change in the European Union: the addition of ten countries to the EU, a new Commission and Parliamentary elections, and the adoption of a draft constitutional treaty.

MORE POSITIVE ABOUT EU PARTICIPATION

3. In general, Europeans appear to feel more positive about their general well-being and their participation in the European Union.

-- Fifty-six percent of respondents are pleased that their country is part of the EU, the highest percentage since 1995, and up 8% since six months ago. However, this view is more commonly held among the 15 Member States, while citizens of the new Member States seemed to feel it was too early to tell, with numbers of neutral answers being particularly high. Residents of the United Kingdom were least pleased to be part of the European Union, with only 38% thinking the UK's EU membership is a good thing.

-- The number of people who believe their country has benefited from belonging to the EU is also higher than at any time in the last ten years) at 53%. This change seems to be due primarily to previously undecided people firming up their opinions, rather than those with a negative view changing their minds. The most positive views on the benefits of EU membership were held in Ireland, Lithuania, Greece, Belgium and Luxembourg; the United Kingdom and Sweden are least positive about the benefits of EU membership.

-- Fifty percent of those surveyed have a very positive or fairly positive image of the EU (a slight increase). It appears familiarity might breed contempt: The country with the highest perception of the EU is not even a member yet; seventy-six percent of Romanians have a positive image of the EU. Turkish citizens also had a positive perception of the EU (63%).

-- Perceptions of European institutions were also up slightly. Fifty-two percent of respondents said they trust the European Commission; fifty-seven percent trust the European Parliament.

-- More than two-thirds of respondents (68%) support the concept of a European Constitution (up from 63% six months ago). This is a response to a very general question, however (Are you for or against a constitution for the European Union), and should not necessarily be seen as support the for the current draft constitutional treaty.

ENLARGEMENT

4. More than half of the people interviewed in the EU 25 are in favor of further expansion in the coming years. This is an increase of 16 points since the beginning of 2004, and includes a significant percentage of respondents who have changed their views from against to for. Indirectly, this may be a sign that respondents so far perceive the recent enlargement as a success. There are a few interesting exceptions to the general rule: sixty-two percent of the citizens of Austria, which borders four new member states,

are against further expansion. Populations in Germany (57%), Luxembourg (54%), Finland (52%) and France (51%) are also against further expansion.

15. The Eurobarometer poll does not ask specific questions about Turkey. However, debate over Turkey's accession was particularly intense around the time the poll was conducted, and it is possible that the anti-expansion views of Germany, France and Austria may not be simply a vote against any further expansion, but may have something to do with possible Turkish accession in particular.

COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY =====

16. More Europeans are in favor of both a common defense/security policy and a common foreign policy, the poll found (respondents are questioned on the two policies separately). Surprisingly, Europeans are more favorably disposed to the nascent defense cooperation among EU members than to the more firmly established foreign policy cooperation. Seventy-eight percent said they are for a common defense and security policy among EU member states, an increase of 5 points since the last poll six months ago, and the highest level of support seen in ten years. Most of the increase in favorable responses came from undecided respondents who changed their opinions to favorable ones. Also a surprise, support for a EU common defense and security policy is especially strong among countries that recently joined NATO (Poland and the Czech Republic, at 85% and 84% respectively).

17. There is also increased support for a common foreign policy, but to a lesser extent; sixty-nine percent of Europeans support this concept. The United Kingdom was the only country to record a level of support below 50%.

US ROLE IN WORLD: NOT HELPING =====

18. The latest poll demonstrates that European perception of the United States continues to be increasingly negative. The poll measured European opinion on U.S. and European roles in fostering world peace and combating terrorism. Asked if the U.S. tends to play a positive role or a negative role . . . regarding promoting peace in the world, 58 percent of respondents said the U.S. played a negative role, with only 22% saying the U.S. plays a positive role. Only 39 percent of respondents felt the U.S. had played a positive role regarding the fight against terrorism; 42 percent believed the U.S. had played a negative role.

19. Only three countries interviewed had a majority positive opinion on the role played by the U.S. to promote world peace: the Czech Republic, Lithuania, and Romania. Opinions on the fight against terrorism are more divided, with a rift appearing between 8 EU countries, which tend to have a more negative view, and the new member states, which are generally more positive.

10. European responses to these very focused questions are particularly worrisome in light of another recent poll conducted by AP-Ipsos. The poll asked whether respondents had a favorable or unfavorable view of Americans. In France and Germany, just over half of those surveyed said they had an unfavorable opinion; in Spain, just under half had an unfavorable view. The AP-Ipsos results suggest that disapproval of specific American policies may now be spilling over into negative views of average Americans.

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